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Question of Cyprus

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Letter dated 16 February 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 15 February 2016, addressed to you by Mr. Mehmet Dânâ, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I would be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 44, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Y. Halit Çevik
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 16 February 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I am writing in response to the letter dated 8 February 2016 addressed to you by the Greek Cypriot representative in New York and circulated as a document of the General Assembly and the Security Council (A/70/721-S/2016/124), which, yet again, contains false assertions similar to those made in his previous letters. In order to set the record straight, I would like to bring the following to your kind attention.

At the outset, regarding the claims of so-called "infringements of international air traffic regulations" and "violations of the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus by Turkey", I wish, once again, to reiterate that flights within the sovereign airspace of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus take place with the full knowledge and consent of the relevant authorities of the State, over which the Greek Cypriot administration in South Cyprus has no jurisdiction or right of say whatsoever. The civil aviation authority of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is the sole competent authority to provide air traffic and aeronautical information services within its own national airspace.

Similarly, the claim in the letter regarding the Turkish Cypriot ports is also baseless, given the fact that the Greek Cypriot administration has no jurisdiction or right of say over Northern Cyprus. Furthermore, this claim ignores the present realities on the ground, namely, the existence of two independent self-governing States on the island of Cyprus, each exercising sovereignty and jurisdiction within its respective territory.

As to the repeated false allegations regarding Ercan Airport in the North, it should once again be underlined that the technologically up-to-date Ercan area control centre and airport in North Cyprus have been providing regular, reliable and safe air traffic services since the Greek Cypriot refusal in 1977 to provide air traffic services in the northern part of the island, in line with its isolation policy that has been imposed on the Turkish Cypriot people. Ever since, all flights within the sovereign airspace of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus have taken place with the full knowledge and permission of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Civil Aviation Department, over which the Greek Cypriot administration in South Cyprus has no jurisdiction or control.

Moreover, the isolation imposed on the Turkish Cypriots which the Greek Cypriot side attempts to perpetuate by encouraging the international community to deem all air and sea ports in Northern Cyprus as "illegal", is in complete contravention to international law, as well as the call made in the report to the Security Council of Mr. Kofi Annan, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, dated 28 May 2004 (S/2004/437, para. 93) in which he clearly states "I would hope they (members of the Security Council) can give a strong lead to all States to cooperate both bilaterally and in international bodies to eliminate unnecessary restrictions and barriers that have the effect of isolating the Turkish Cypriots and impeding their development, deeming such a move as consistent with Security Council resolutions 541 (1983) and 550 (1984)".

The legislation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on aeronautical safety meets all standards and recommendations of the International Civil Aviation

Organization, providing safe and swift navigation of aircraft landing at or taking off from Ercan Airport and using airspace of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. All airports in Northern Cyprus are in full conformity with international standards, and necessary investments have been made to keep up with the developing technology. The number of air traffic controllers has been increased in accordance with the increasing number of flights over the years, and the Ercan area control centre is in regular and close cooperation with the Ankara area control centre in order to ensure the safe conduct of all flights in the region. In 2015 alone, the number of passengers that used Ercan Airport stood at nearly 3,500,000 (compared to 3,250,000 in 2014), while a 7 per cent increase is expected in 2016. Moreover, in 2015, nearly 26,000 planes used Ercan Airport for arrival and departure, and around 210,000 planes used the Ercan advisory airspace, to which a 7 per cent increase is again expected in 2016. In that respect, it must be stressed that the Turkish Cypriot side is committed to upholding the highest standards in the field of air navigation safety in full conformity with the Chicago Convention of 1944, and that it is ready to cooperate with the Greek Cypriot authorities on this very important issue.

At a time when the comprehensive settlement negotiations are progressing swiftly in a results-oriented atmosphere, I deem it necessary to stress the need to fully channel all our efforts towards achieving a just and lasting settlement of the Cyprus conflict in line with the established United Nations parameters and the Joint Declaration of 11 February 2014, which envisage a new partnership on the basis of the political equality of the two peoples of the island within the framework of a bizonal, bicommunal federation with two constituent states of equal status. Moreover, the Greek Cypriot administration should once again be reminded that its counterpart is and has always been the Turkish Cypriot side, not Turkey.

Availing myself of the present opportunity, I would like to call upon the Greek Cypriot side to discontinue such counterproductive and outdated rhetoric, which is not reflective of the joint vision and cooperation expressed by the leaders of both communities on the island since the resumption of the settlement talks in May 2015. As the two future partners in the island of Cyprus, we should never lose sight of the fact that the solution of the Cyprus problem will comprehensively deal with all pending issues between the two sides and thus focus all our efforts towards the ultimate goal of settlement.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that, as the Turkish Cypriot side, we are committed to maintaining our constructive and positive stance within the context of your good offices mission in Cyprus and encourage our Greek Cypriot neighbours to follow a similar path.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 44, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mehmet **Dânâ**
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

United Nations A/70/737

General Assembly

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Lessons learned exercise on the coordination activities of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/274 B, the present report outlines the key findings from the dedicated lessons learned exercise conducted with regard to the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER).

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I. Introduction

1. In September 2014, at the height of the Ebola crisis, the Secretary-General, in identical letters dated 17 September 2014 to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council (A/69/389-S/2014/679), proposed the establishment of the first ever United Nations emergency health mission to harness the capabilities and competencies of all the relevant United Nations actors under a unified operational structure to reinforce unity of purpose, effective ground-level leadership and operational direction. The Secretary-General's intention to establish the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), following a joint appeal dated 29 August 2014 from the Presidents of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone for the United Nations to coordinate international support for nationally led response efforts, was welcomed by the General Assembly and the Mission was established on 19 September 2014 following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 69/1.

2. In the lead-up to the Mission's establishment, the spread of Ebola in West Africa outpaced the capacity of the World Health Organization (WHO) and front-line responders to put in place the logistics, medical and material capacities needed to stem the spread of the virus. United Nations country teams in the affected countries undertook programme criticality exercises in order to repurpose activities to respond to Ebola-related needs, but existing capacities required galvanizing support to scale up the level and pace of their interventions so as to be commensurate with the escalating emergency. WHO advocated that it required substantial resources and robust logistics capacities to scale up to the level required. There was debate among Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals as to how to classify the crisis and whether the humanitarian community was best placed, or capacitated, given overstretch with multiple level-three crises to respond to an outbreak. Ultimately, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee did not designate the Ebola crisis as a level-three humanitarian emergency.

3. On 8 August 2014, in line with the unanimous view of the Emergency Committee convened under the International Health Regulations for the 2014 Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in West Africa, the Director General of WHO declared that the Ebola outbreak met the conditions to be classified as a public health emergency of international concern. On 12 August, the Secretary-General appointed a United Nations System Senior Coordinator for Ebola Virus Disease, who later was reappointed as Special Envoy on Ebola on 23 September 2014. On 8 September, the Secretary-General activated the Organization's emergency response mechanism and named a Deputy Ebola Coordinator and Operation Crisis Manager to support the operationalization of the overall response plan of the United Nations. International health experts projected that Ebola was spreading at an exponential rate. The outbreak was no longer just a public health emergency, but had become multidimensional, requiring a whole-of-system response. The Security Council, in its resolution 2177 (2014), which was unanimously adopted on 18 September 2014, declared the Ebola outbreak a threat to international peace and security.

4. At the time of writing, according to WHO, there have been 28,638 cases and 11,316 deaths as a result of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The outbreak wrought serious humanitarian, economic, development and health consequences for the people and countries affected. Sixteen months since the passage of General Assembly resolution 69/1, the world faces a dramatically different situation, with

transmission of the disease, directly linked to the 2014 outbreak, having been declared over in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Subsequently, all three countries have experienced small flare-ups of new cases associated with virus persistence in survivors; in all cases, the continued prevention, surveillance and response capacities in countries and among responding partners has resulted in rapid containment.

II. Mandate and role of the Mission

5. It is necessary to situate the decision to establish UNMEER in this context. Through providing a command structure and working closely and in a coordinated manner with existing United Nations presences, the Mission's strategic purpose was to work with others to support the Governments of the affected countries in stopping the Ebola outbreak. In his proposal to establish UNMEER, the Secretary-General stated that, in carrying out its mandate, the Mission was to be guided by six principles (see A/69/389-S/2014/769):

(a) Reinforce government leadership;

(b) Deliver rapid impact on the ground;

(c) Closely coordinate and collaborate with actors outside the United Nations;

(d) Tailor responses to particular needs in the different countries;

(e) Reaffirm WHO lead on all health issues;

(f) Identify benchmarks for transition post-emergency and ensure that actions strengthen systems.

6. In the proposal, the Secretary-General elaborated that the Mission, through presences within the affected States, would provide needed field-level support to the Governments and peoples of West Africa as they responded to the crisis. As a regional mission, UNMEER had its headquarters situated in Accra and country offices in each of the three most affected countries, but its mandate also gave it the flexibility to expand its presence regionally in line with the spread of the Ebola outbreak and the requests of other governments in the region; this enabled the rapid start-up of an office in Mali, upon the request of the government. The regional presence was envisaged to facilitate the efficient prioritization of resources and capacities across the affected countries and the provision of operational direction across affected areas to ensure coherence in response strategies, especially in addressing the cross-border spread of the virus.

7. From the outset, in response to an unprecedented situation, UNMEER had to be sufficiently nimble to meet needs on the ground in line with the rapidly evolving epidemiological situation. UNMEER was mandated to develop and implement a comprehensive system-wide response framework to make the strategic guidance of the Special Envoy on Ebola operational (see A/69/590). By convening the Accra Planning Conference from 15 to 18 October 2014, UNMEER played a key facilitating role in bringing the United Nations system together to support the unanimous adoption of an operational framework that codified lead responsibility for the delivery of critical lines of action and enabling activities within the system. UNMEER was envisaged as the facilitator to support delivery across the entire operational framework, with operational front-line United Nations and

non-governmental entities as the implementers of specific lines of action and enabling activities. As the facilitator, the relationship of UNMEER vis-à-vis the rest of the United Nations system and its implementing partners was vital to support effective implementation and operational coherence.

8. In his proposal, the Secretary-General further elaborated upon his strategy that the Mission would be a temporary measure, existing only as long as necessary to stem the crisis, stating that "when Ebola virus disease no longer poses a grave threat to the people of the infected countries, the Mission will have achieved its objective and will be disbanded".

9. The lifespan of the Mission can be broadly categorized into three distinct stages. In the initial stage, given the urgent need to scale up human capacities, infrastructure and logistics, robust action was required to provide the speed to enable such a scaling up. The Mission's second stage focused on consolidation of the response through enhanced coordination to leverage the capacities of United Nations entities, especially to decentralize the response. The third stage was marked by more dispersed cases and hence an analogous requirement to focus on the technical refinement of the response. By playing a facilitating role in filling such gaps, UNMEER demonstrated responsiveness in recalibrating its posture in response to strategic input from host governments, Member States and United Nations entities, as well as in line with epidemiological trends.

10. UNMEER closed on 31 July 2015, following a six-month phased transition that was adjusted in line with the evolving epidemiology of the outbreak and allocated time for United Nations system entities to scale up as UNMEER scaled down. The transition was also tailored to each country and involved a gradual downsizing. The office in Mali closed on 31 March 2015; the Liberia office closed on 31 May 2015; and the Guinea and Sierra Leone offices closed on 31 July 2015. The Mission headquarters in Accra downsized considerably, through redeploying some assets and capacities to Guinea and Sierra Leone, and closed down by 31 May 2015, except for its usage as a transit hub. On 1 August, oversight of the United Nations system's Ebola emergency response was fully transferred from UNMEER to WHO, through the Inter-agency Collaboration on Ebola, led by WHO.

III. Methodology and scope of lessons learned exercise

11. The present report presents the key findings from the dedicated lessons learned exercise conducted with regard to the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/274 B. The General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General provide detailed information, in the context of his lessons learned exercise, on the coordination activities of the Mission and the Office of the Special Envoy with the wider United Nations system, the Governments of the most affected countries and other actors and include the results of his in-depth review of the organizational, administrative and planning aspects, and operation on the ground, as well as information on the final performance of the Mission. In welcoming the establishment of the High-Level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises, the Assembly also encouraged the Secretary-General to ensure that the lessons learned exercises are complementary.

12. In accordance with paragraphs 9 to 11 of General Assembly resolution 69/274 B, the Secretary-General underscored, in a message to all respondents, that

the objective of the lessons learned exercise was not to validate the experience of UNMEER, but to provide candid feedback and broader insight into how the United Nations system collectively manages crisis response. The lessons learned exercise analyses UNMEER performance in terms of what it was mandated to do, as well as its role within the overall United Nations system response. It was conducted from September to December 2015 in close collaboration with the International Peace Institute, leveraging the policy research, strategic analysis and convening capabilities of the Institute in support of the exercise. The exercise is unique in being the only review process focused on the operational modality to respond to the Ebola outbreak.

13. The Secretary-General set clear guidance that the lessons learned exercise constitutes a critical assessment of which aspects of the Mission's experience should be considered for replication in future emergencies and which should not. The exercise involved a multipronged process of gathering information to identify cross-cutting findings. In addition to a comprehensive desk review, 175 non-attributed individual interviews were conducted with key United Nations, non-governmental, civil society, national, regional and intergovernmental response actors. The research was further validated through three consultative round tables undertaken under the Chatham House Rule and moderated by the International Peace Institute. The first high-level round-table discussion took place on 15 October 2015 in New York, bringing together permanent representatives from 22 Member States that played an operational role in the Ebola response. Twenty principals of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, supporting departments and all three former Special Representatives of the Secretary-General for UNMEER participated in a second high-level round table, on 22 October 2015 in New York. A final round table was held on 3 and 4 November 2015 in Dakar and convened 40 participants from the governments of the affected countries, front-line non-governmental organizations, key bilateral response actors and regional representatives from all front-line operational United Nations entities. Field visits to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone were conducted from 6 to 15 November 2015.

14. The key findings presented below are organized into three overarching thematic areas: leadership, organization, and operational impact and delivery, with lessons learned highlighted in bold.

IV. Managing the crisis: the critical role of leadership

A. Role of high-level leadership

15. Leadership at the national, regional and international levels played a critical role in mobilizing high-level engagement to address the crisis in a manner that was commensurate with the gravity of the Ebola outbreak.

16. One of the key findings of the exercise was that the establishment of UNMEER played a catalytic role in mobilizing the necessary financial and human resources to scale up the response. Representatives from a number of United Nations entities indicated that they were able to fundraise more effectively by leveraging the momentum generated through the establishment of UNMEER.

17. Member States and United Nations principals who participated in the two high-level round tables welcomed the decisive action of the General Assembly in adopting resolution 69/1. The engagement of the Assembly in convening regular briefings throughout the outbreak ensured a continuous focus on ending the outbreak.

18. The personal engagement of senior leadership from the governments of the affected countries was hailed as critical in uniting national responders and in galvanizing international support. Regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Mano River Union, played a key role in raising awareness of the outbreak, mobilizing political and financial support from countries in the region and the continent in solidarity with the affected countries, and deploying responders.

19. Participants in the three round tables asserted that throughout the lifespan of the Mission, the direct and sustained engagement of the Secretary-General was critical to ensuring that the crisis was prioritized at the highest level across the United Nations system. The Secretary-General's personal advocacy on key political, strategic, resource and operational issues affecting the response was identified as essential. It also ensured that the appointed senior leadership, the Special Envoy on Ebola, at the strategic global level, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for UNMEER, at the regional level, and the Ebola Crisis Managers, at the country level, were empowered to deliver their mandates.

20. The Organization-wide inter-agency and cross-departmental collaboration demanded by the crisis required executive management from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The Office established a high-level oversight and management mechanism, from October 2014 until the closure of UNMEER, to provide ongoing guidance and direction to UNMEER and, through engagement with the heads of front-line operational United Nations entities and supporting departments, to ensure operational and strategic alignment in the response. The executive management of the crisis was integral in providing quick action, strong direction and oversight and ensured that the Mission's leadership was empowered through direct access and communication with the Secretary-General's office to escalate issues for immediate political or operational intervention. Effective executive direction and management of a system-wide crisis are fundamental to ensuring unity of purpose, timely problem-solving and necessary adjustments to meet evolving operational requirements.

B. Importance of technical leadership

21. UNMEER was mandated to combine the technical expertise of WHO with the operational strengths and capabilities of the United Nations entities. In its original conceptualization, UNMEER leadership was envisaged to include a senior health official nominated by WHO to serve as the deputy of the Mission. However, this was not the final structure ultimately agreed by all United Nations entities at the Accra Planning Conference in October 2014. Instead, given the speed at which the outbreak was evolving and the importance of constantly adjusting the response strategy to local conditions, the Special Representative of the Director General of WHO for the Ebola Response played a roving role. The lessons learned exercise found that the technical leadership of WHO was integral to the Mission's effectiveness in providing operational direction to response partners and that

deploying a dedicated, senior WHO official in situ as the deputy to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for UNMEER in the beginning would have better capacitated the Mission in this regard, although not eliminated the need for roving technical expertise. In the absence of this constant, high-level technical presence in the earlier stage of the Mission's deployment, it was noted that the Special Envoy on Ebola often played a substitutive role in the region in providing the medical strategy underpinning the work of the Mission.

22. The deployment of this high-level technical expertise could have also helped UNMEER to identify and mobilize more quickly the specialized capacities that were required to contain the outbreak, including epidemiologists, as well as to fully staff the Ebola response health pillar of the Mission, which was overseen by a Director of Emergency Operations from WHO at the D-2 level, with longer-duration deployments of staff. Once WHO had a more constant high-level presence in the region, it was well received among respondents to the exercise, with that official viewed as being highly effective in informing shifts in the operational strategy in line with the epidemiology. **In order to mount an effective specialized crisis response, it is essential that the specialized expertise be provided at the highest level as part of the senior strategic leadership team and that both high-level and technical-level staff be integrated quickly and sustainably into the response.**

C. Role of the Special Envoy on Ebola

23. The Special Envoy on Ebola was mandated to represent the United Nations system and provide overarching strategic leadership, coordination and guidance, as well as to lead international resource mobilization, strategic communications and advocacy efforts. He was also mandated to work closely with WHO to develop and provide the overall global strategic response plan that would align the efforts of the Mission and other operational partners (see A/69/660, para. 10 (a)). Overall, in the course of the lessons learned exercise, it was found that there was a positive synergy between the corresponding roles of the Special Envoy on Ebola, who, with his global response mandate, was externally focused in carrying out the strategic and policy priorities outlined above, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for UNMEER, who was focused on managing the United Nations system's operational response in the affected region.

24. According to widespread feedback received during the lessons learned exercise, the Special Envoy on Ebola played an important and complementary role in the response. Member State participants in the high-level round table referred to his crucial role in supporting the exchange of information among responders from the global to the field level through the Global Ebola Response Coalition. He served a critical role of providing continuity for the response, including by supporting a smooth transition from UNMEER to the Inter-agency Collaboration on Ebola.

25. National representatives validated the utility of the Ebola Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund, which was managed by the Special Envoy on Ebola, in providing a rapid influx of programme funds to meet identified critical gaps in the response through projects implemented by the Mission, United Nations entities and implementing partners. **The provision of programme funds in an emergency response is a key element of responding flexibly and of being able to rapidly meet identified critical gaps in the response.**

26. Designated the United Nations system lead for strategic communications on the Ebola response, the Special Envoy on Ebola was mandated to support the development and promulgation of the communications strategy across the United Nations system. In the high-level round table with Member States, it was noted that there were discordant messages in the early stage of the response and that such a unified communications strategy was needed from the outset.

27. United Nations system entities cited that, soon after the deployment of UNMEER, a severe disconnect arose between the expectations for the Mission and its resourced capacities, which confused messaging. The lack of alignment on whether the Mission's ambit of responsibility would extend beyond stopping the outbreak and treating the infected to the operationalization of the broader strategic priorities, including providing essential services, preserving stability and preventing outbreaks in non-affected countries, as outlined for the United Nations system in the Special Envoy's strategic framework, created initial confusion between UNMEER and United Nations entities. It was clarified in the context of the Accra Planning Conference that UNMEER, as a temporary emergency mission, had not been given the resources or the expertise to assume all of those longer-term priorities. The scope of the Special Envoy's strategic framework covered the entire system and extended beyond the Mission's operational framework to the mandates of system entities.

28. Feedback from the lessons learned exercise systematically concluded that the United Nations could have played a more effective role in aligning messaging early in the response. The eventual development of a system-wide communications strategy and core set of messaging, which was disseminated and reinforced with United Nations communication focal points, was viewed as instrumental in coordinating and unifying response actors. Respondents concluded that having stronger communications linkages to the field through capacity in the affected countries, rather than capacity centralized only at United Nations headquarters and Mission headquarters in Accra, would have helped in tailoring and socializing messaging with audiences on the ground. **Strategic communications should be prioritized as an integral component of crisis response from the outset, with a designated system lead and decentralized communications capacity in the field.**

D. Importance of regional United Nations leadership: the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

29. A widespread finding was that the leadership profile must match the needs on the ground as they evolve throughout the different stages of an emergency. Respondents noted that the changes in Mission leadership corresponded with three distinct stages of the response. In the first stage, a leader with crisis field support expertise was required given the significant infrastructural and logistics challenges involved in facilitating a massive scale-up of the response; by the second stage, with the enablers for the response largely in place, facilitating leadership was needed to leverage partnerships, especially to decentralize the response; and in the third phase, a leader with technical expertise was needed at the helm of the Mission to support the granular readjustment of the operational strategy to the dispersed and localized nature of the outbreak. The role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was viewed as critical in elaborating the operational framework to guide the efforts of partners and ensure coherence in the responses across the affected

countries. The Special Representative also reinforced the good offices of the Ebola Crisis Managers through playing a regional, roving political role.

E. Importance of country-level empowered leadership

30. The lessons learned exercise elicited resounding feedback that effective leadership, empowered through the Secretary-General's stewardship of the response, represented one of the most valuable contributions of UNMEER. At the country-level, the Ebola Crisis Managers were regarded as highly effective in providing a cross-sectoral interface at a senior level with the governments of the affected countries by providing a mechanism for quick and empowered action in support of operational partners. They also played a key representational role on behalf of United Nations entities with bilateral partners and donors, including through formal mechanisms such as the donor coordination group that UNMEER established in Guinea. While the Crisis Managers also sought to support linkages with non-governmental and civil society actors, respondents were of the view that this coordination could have been more inclusive and the system's Ebola coordination was seen as being too inwardly focused. The leadership functions that UNMEER undertook helped to streamline communication and decision-making with government counterparts through providing a single entry point for the United Nations system, raised the level of political access, and supported relations among partners, notably where there were areas of strategic or operational divergence.

31. Participants in the Dakar round table concluded that, while the coordination functions performed by the Ebola Crisis Managers were broadly analogous to those of a humanitarian coordinator, the Crisis Managers were perceived as more empowered to focus on the particular programmatic and political challenges of responding to an unpredictable public health crisis and enjoyed greater access and convening authority. During the high-level inter-agency consultation process on the Mission's transition, the fact that all United Nations principals advocated strongly for the retention of the Ebola Crisis Manager functions was testament to their perceived value.

F. Tailoring leadership profiles to operational requirements

32. The heads of United Nations entities and supporting departments played key roles through the executive management mechanism in propelling the necessary operational shifts within their respective entities. The feedback gathered through the lessons learned exercise indicated with consistency that the more operational, emergency-focused United Nations entities, with the flexibility to ensure that the right leadership was in place to match the operational requirements and adapt their country presence to exigencies on the ground, were more nimble in making those adjustments as and when required. It was suggested that other parts of the United Nations system could consider modalities for adopting policies to ensure the same degree of field-focused flexibility. **The capacity to reset the Organization's operational posture and recalibrate its presence and leadership profile in a country to an evolving context is a critical component of being an effective crisis responder.**

V. Organizing the response: the value of coordination and partnership

A. Relationship between the Mission and the United Nations system

33. Even with a command structure in place, respondents overwhelmingly observed that it is still necessary to engage actively in consultation with implementing partners and coordinate effectively in order to bring them on board, elicit their buy-in and leverage existing mechanisms, capacities and economies of scale. This does not discredit the necessity for command in an acute outbreak, but demonstrates that effective coordination in fact enhances command.

34. In his proposal for establishing the Mission, the Secretary-General stated that UNMEER would both provide effective ground-level leadership and operational direction and work closely and in a coordinated manner with existing United Nations presences, thereby indicating that command and coordination were not mutually exclusive. During the lessons learned exercise, however, respondents commented on a dichotomy having emerged between command and control and coordination, at the early stage of UNMEER deployment. UNMEER subsequently reoriented itself to play a greater coordination role.

35. Front-line operational United Nations entities also helped to induce this strategic shift, which began in December 2014 and gained momentum in January 2015, both at the leadership level through the high-level executive management mechanism, as well as in establishing the Coordination Board at the regional level in February 2015. The Coordination Board effectively included front-line operational system entities in the management and strategic-decision making of the emergency response. Having multilevel coordination platforms in place at the global, regional and country levels had a mutually reinforcing impact and supported the implementation of decisions reached at the level of principals in the executive management mechanism.

36. While UNMEER, with the technical guidance of WHO, set the overall strategy, it needed to harness the capabilities and competencies of its United Nations partners to allow each entity to perform its lead responsibility, which fell within its expertise and mandate, thereby leveraging the concept of best-placed agency. Front-line operational entities played a key role in promoting the understanding that UNMEER was deployed with limited resources to fill gaps on its own but was expected to raise awareness of gaps through its overarching coordination role and direct the capacities of United Nations and other implementing partners to fill them. **The requirement for centralized decision-making and command in an emergency does not negate the benefits of coordination and collaboration. Putting in place effective mechanisms to engage all key stakeholders in the management and strategic decision-making of a response engenders greater collective accountability and operational effectiveness.**

B. Tailoring response structures to operational requirements

37. At the time UNMEER was established, the affected countries were in different stages of the outbreak, with specific needs and varying capacities on the ground. The concept of UNMEER recognized that fact, with one of the guiding principles

being the need to ensure a tailored response. Feedback was given during the lessons learned exercise to the effect that the Mission's design should have been tailored to the exigencies of each country, which would have ensured greater complementarity with existing capacities and likely would have yielded a modified Mission structure in each country. It was similarly found that ensuring the optimum use of existing United Nations presences and capacities would also have helped to better tailor the design to local needs.

38. As UNMEER became more established in the affected countries closer to the epicentre of the outbreak, it became more adept at tailoring its presence to actual operational gaps and needs. For example, the Mission redeployed its assets and capacities to support a surge in April 2015 in advance of the rainy season. The leadership of United Nations entities, who advocated for greater inclusion of capacities on the ground, as well as host governments, who promoted a regional approach, enabled this optimization of resources across the region in response to existing needs. In December 2014, the General Assembly also encouraged greater emphasis on reallocating resources and activities from Mission headquarters to the front lines in order to achieve maximum impact on the ground (see resolution 69/262, sect. X, para. 4). **In a regional response, structures should be carefully tailored to the exigencies and existing capacities of each country.**

39. While the preliminary field assessments of the Special Envoy on Ebola in August and September 2014 informed the planning process for the Mission, the situation on the ground was fluid and fast-evolving. A tension existed between the need for speed and urgency to respond, given the gravity of the situation, and the ability to engage in more extensive consultation and information-gathering in the planning process. In the context of his report on the implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, the Secretary-General noted that, where a significant presence was immediately required, the initial mandate may not encompass all tasks. In such cases, further reports of the Secretary-General would thereafter track progress and identify options for changes to the Mission's strategy and mandate, where needed (see A/70/357-S/2015/680, para. 59). The Ebola response, through its monthly reporting to the General Assembly and its budget submissions, demonstrated the benefit of this process of adjustment to meet the changing situation on the ground.

40. The initial mission planning process was led by an empowered senior leader reporting to the Secretary-General, with access to technical guidance at the senior-most levels of WHO, and supported by a dedicated, co-located multidisciplinary planning team. In the absence of being able to plan in situ, a greater emphasis was required on continuous bottom-up planning through leveraging the situational knowledge of United Nations and national capacities on the ground in the assessment and planning period. This may have helped to provide the field-level information required to better tailor the response to the specific capacity gaps in each country, taking into account the roles that existing actors could usefully play. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, a small centralized analysis and planning capacity, as is currently being established in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, will draw on and compile information and analysis across the system to prepare strategic considerations and options for possible responses (see A/70/357-S/2015/680, para. 54). This capacity will contribute to strengthening the United Nations capacity to respond to the twin

challenges of integrating and analysing disparate sources of information from across the Organization in a timely manner, and supporting disciplined planning processes to arrive at more tailored operational responses.

41. Initial budgetary requirements for UNMEER submitted in September 2014 were based on projections made on the exponential spread of Ebola provided by international health experts at the time of submission (see A/69/404). Subsequent budget submissions reflected significant adjustments, which took into account more precise information on the epidemiological situation, the impact of national and international response efforts, and adaptations in the Mission's own role (see A/69/590 and Corr.1). The submission made to the General Assembly in March 2015 further reflected the planned drawdown of the Mission and a timeline for closure of country offices, given the epidemiological situation and an assessment of strengthened national and international response capacities at that time (see A/69/842).

C. Leveraging existing mechanisms to ensure optimum complementarity

42. The lessons learned exercise highlighted that there are inefficiencies in the use of new mechanisms in terms of time lost through the familiarization process required. It underscored the need to build upon existing coordination mechanisms and familiar terminology, where applicable, so as to reduce confusion, especially in the midst of a crisis, among implementing partners. Deploying UNMEER as a new entity did not preclude leveraging existing mechanisms, structures, knowledge and people. In some instances, it was found that UNMEER had effectively established or utilized coordination mechanisms for liaison and consultation with United Nations entities that were familiar, such as through the Ebola response team, a country-level coordination mechanism comprised of front-line operational system entities akin to a humanitarian country team.

43. Respondents emphasised that utilizing existing coordination mechanisms ensures greater integration with actors already on the ground and facilitates greater continuity. Where UNMEER ensured inclusion of the existing structures, mechanisms and people, it was also able to best provide for this continuity in the period after the drawdown. Widespread feedback revealed that there could have been greater integration with the resident coordinators and that this would have helped to ensure a more seamless sequencing of the response with recovery efforts. The degree of complementarity varied from country to country. In Liberia, it was found that there was greater complementarity with existing structures and mechanisms, with the Ebola Crisis Manager as a member of the country team and senior management team of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Front-line operational system entities asserted that they would have supported better coordination with their regional bureaus if the planned liaison capacity for UNMEER in Dakar had materialized. It was also perceived that the use of existing humanitarian coordination mechanisms such as clusters would have facilitated more inclusive engagement with non-governmental actors. With the exception of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which was formally included in the Coordination Board, humanitarian non-governmental actors generally reflected that they did not have sufficient engagement with UNMEER. **While cognizant of the need, at times, to utilize innovative solutions to address**

unprecedented situations, there remains a benefit to employing, to the extent possible, existing mechanisms and familiar terminology in order to minimize inefficiencies implicit in the use of new constructs.

D. Role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

44. Starting in March 2014, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs provided operational support to the Ebola emergency response, including through the deployment of information management and coordination support to the affected countries and the deployment of a United Nations disaster assessment and coordination team into Liberia in September 2014. Since the establishment of UNMEER, over 140 staff from the Office provided support to the Ebola response through UNMEER, WHO and the resident coordinators, in the areas of financial tracking, information management and humanitarian coordination. The Office did not deploy in the numbers or with the capacities that it would have in response to an level-three humanitarian emergency as designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Many respondents cited this as the reason for the perceived coordination gap, noting that UNMEER could have leveraged the Office's coordination tools and capacities. National government and Member State representatives lamented that UNMEER did not play a greater role in donor coordination and real-time financial tracking at the country level. Retrospectively, the Office of the Special Envoy on Ebola, in close consultation with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, tracked donor funds and developed three overview of needs and requirements reports and resource mobilization plans for the region. **Even if another entity is deployed in the lead of a crisis response, the coordination toolkit of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs still adds value and should be leveraged.**

E. Location of the Mission

45. At the time of the Mission's establishment, air flight restrictions had been imposed with regard to travel to the affected countries and there was a growing sense of fear of exposure and infection. In this context, a decision was taken to establish a headquarters in Accra, with the support of the Government of Ghana, where there was also a World Food Programme (WFP) humanitarian response depot and an air bridge to facilitate the frequent transport of personnel and supplies to the affected countries and to offices in each of the affected countries. The headquarters was acknowledged to have served a practical purpose early in the response in facilitating the influx of goods, supplies and personnel into the affected countries.

46. While the practical rationale for designating Accra as the headquarters of UNMEER was acknowledged, it was found that the headquarters location exacerbated UNMEER detachment from operational partners. National representatives and a number of operational partners suggested that the Mission could have been based in one of the affected countries, which would have facilitated quicker decision-making. There was unanimous feedback, echoed in all three round tables and reinforced through the interview process as part of the lessons learned exercise, that the Accra headquarters should have had a considerably lighter footprint proportionate to UNMEER presence in the affected countries. It was further posited that the balance of the Mission's presence should have shifted much earlier to the relevant

countries. **Effective operational coordination is greatly enhanced through getting as close to the crisis as the situation permits, enabling the more effective provision of strategic oversight and operational direction to responders.**

F. Staffing of the Mission

47. The lessons learned exercise concluded that, while UNMEER was quickly established and deployed, it took time to become operational and fully staffed. Initially, UNMEER borrowed human, materiel and transport capacities from UNMIL and United Nations country teams. UNMEER struggled to identify and deploy sufficient personnel with the specialized skill sets required to address the response in a timely manner, highlighting the importance of a clear, function-based staffing strategy that focuses on targeting recruitment efforts to comparative advantages. The Secretariat did not have appropriate rosters to draw on for several of the functional areas, such as case management, which lay within the expertise of various system entities. Eventually, UNMEER drew on staff from United Nations entities through inter-agency loan arrangements to fill these gaps. Special measures put in place to facilitate the expedited recruitment and deployment processes could not be fully leveraged, absent a staffing strategy to meet priority requirements. There were challenges as regards inter-agency loans with specialized system entities, whose staff rules and regulations were not always aligned with those of the Secretariat and where pre-existing inter-agency loan agreements to facilitate interoperability were not in place.

48. Regarding the Mission's staffing structure, the view remains that only staff of the requisite experience and stature would be able to engage effectively at the highest levels of the national governments, the United Nations system and international community. The nature of the response and high level of key interlocutors required that the structure be headed at the Under-Secretary-General level, with responsibility for the overall regional response, and with the Ebola Crisis Managers, in each country, at the Assistant Secretary-General level. Beyond these leadership positions, the overall number of senior-level posts in the Mission was adjusted in the revised budget submission of March 2015 (see A/69/842). Four posts at the D-2 level and six posts at the D-1 level in the UNMEER staffing table were abolished. **In budgetary planning, requirements for the number and level of posts should be continually assessed, throughout a mission's deployment, against evolving needs.**

G. Ensuring a field-focused emergency administrative framework

49. Ensuring adequate in-country medical treatment facilities and MEDEVAC capacity was critical to medical preparedness and duty of care. The absence of systemic solutions in these areas, amid growing fears of infection, was viewed as a deterrent to mobilizing responders and staff. While in-country treatment options for United Nations personnel were eventually put in place, Ebola-related medical evacuation required costly and highly specialized aviation capacities. Despite advocacy efforts by the Secretary-General, the Director General of WHO, the Deputy Secretary-General, the Chef de Cabinet and the Special Envoy on Ebola, agreements with receiving countries to hospitalize those who were evacuated were reached on a case-by-case basis, with no standing agreements for infected United

Nations personnel. **As part of system-wide preparedness, Member States are encouraged to establish the standby agreements to better support any future responses to public health crises.**

50. In an effort to make the internal administrative framework for UNMEER more flexible and field-focused, the Mission received approval for 10 separate special measures. Without the benefit of a set of "standing administrative measures", UNMEER requested special measures and exceptions, similar to those that had been requested in recent crisis responses and start-up contexts. The special measures package that was approved was vital to the rapid deployment of UNMEER and enabled the Mission to recruit a significant number of staff, although the actual staffing and operationalization of the Mission took considerably longer. The procurement and disposal delegations were key not only in enabling UNMEER to operate effectively from the time of its initial approval, but also in ensuring that its material capabilities were able to be effectively and sustainably maintained through its closure.

51. In enabling a system-wide response, it was found that, in addition to the utilization of special measures, UNMEER needed to leverage the comparative advantages of United Nations entities better equipped to carry out certain tasks. In an emergency, it is critical to get the enablers in place, such as vehicles, fuel and phones, and the best-placed actor who can do this in the most cost-effective and swift manner should be leveraged.

52. **In line with the recommendation of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, the Secretary-General is putting in place standing administrative measures for start-up and crisis situations to go into effect with the certification of a crisis or emergency. Such measures should form part of the solution, but are not a panacea. While such measures should accelerate certain processes to obtain staff, goods and services, they will be limited in scope. The effective usage of other mechanisms, including inter-mission cooperation, standing arrangements with Member States and specialized entities, as well as leveraging capacities based upon the principle of comparative advantage, will remain critical. These measures must also be situated within comprehensive strategies for staffing, procurement and other areas, in order to be effective.**

VI. Fulfilling the mandate: operational impact and delivery

A. Leveraging comparative advantages to play a facilitating role

53. In his proposal, the Secretary-General stated that the Mission would provide effective leadership, avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure the efficient prioritization of available assets and resources. As the system-wide umbrella for the Ebola response, UNMEER was neither mandated nor resourced to deliver the stand-alone capacity or expertise to subsume all critical functions, but rather to provide the operational framework to harness and support the integration of those functions being performed across the United Nations system, on the basis of comparative advantage and mandated responsibility. For example, with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as the lead for social mobilization, UNMEER needed only to support, not supplant, the work that UNICEF was best positioned to

undertake. Given that technical expertise was required to inform the development of training strategies and curricula for health-care workers and responders, UNMEER needed to leverage WHO to provide training. The Mission's mandate, by design, required that it play a facilitating role to identify gaps and leverage the capacities of United Nations or non-United Nations entities to fill them. UNMEER played a key role, for example, in bringing in external, highly specialized statistical analysis and anthropological capacities, as well as tapping into the expertise offered within foundations, to increase understanding of the trajectory of the outbreak and community-sensitive interventions. The lessons learned exercise found, however, that in some instances UNMEER assumed responsibility for activities, such as information management, that other United Nations entities were better placed to fulfil.[1]

54. United Nations partners were of the view that UNMEER was considerably more effective in a facilitating rather than in an implementing capacity. This implied the Mission's role in setting up the operational framework for the response, providing the logistics backbone, together with WFP, ensuring a multi-country and regional approach and providing coordination and political good offices. Where UNMEER became overly involved in the technical response, such as in information management, respondents noted that the Mission would have been more effective had it deferred to the agencies with respective comparative advantages and in situ expertise in those areas.

55. While UNMEER supported aligning response partners around an operational framework, it was viewed as markedly less effective in providing the coordination that was required at the field level. UNMEER faced challenges in identifying and recruiting field crisis managers with the right profiles, skill sets and willingness to deploy. This role was not always clearly defined, in contrast with WHO Ebola field coordinators. A number of Member State representatives highlighted that a higher level of technical leadership and capacity at the district level was necessary, as not all field crisis managers who were deployed had the requisite experience and seniority necessary to coordinate response partners. This was an area where it was identified that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs may have been better equipped to meet this requirement through the deployment of coordination experts, distinct from UNMEER, from its field-focused surge rosters. This finding is further supported by the assumption of such field coordination functions by the Office within the Inter-agency Collaboration on Ebola response. **The principle of comparative advantage should guide the designation of roles and responsibilities in the establishment of a new entity.**

B. Role of the Mission in providing operational direction

56. The lessons learned exercise found that one of the key expectations among United Nations entities was that the Mission would provide an operational platform and centralized procurement and distribution capacity to deliver the enablers necessary to facilitate their staff deployments into the field. While UNMEER aviation assets supported the decentralization of the response, the operational platform to support field-level deployments of responders did not fully materialize.

[1] See report No. 2015/119 of the Internal Audit Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, "Audit of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response" (14 October 2015).

In addition, while the centralized procurement capacity was initially envisaged as part of the range of services that UNMEER would provide, it was soon found that the Mission was not best equipped to carry out that function, given that other system entities already had established supply chains for procuring personal protective equipment and other key materiel requirements.

57. An example frequently cited of UNMEER effectively filling a gap and bringing relevant partners and capacities together was in the context of Operation Western Area Surge in Sierra Leone, in November 2014. UNMEER supported the surge through the deployment of a dedicated team integrating senior-level WHO technical and operations expertise; airlifted assets and capacities, including a European Union laboratory from Liberia, as well as ambulances; and ensured that key elements of the operational strategy were in place, from social mobilization to laboratories to bed capacity. In the surge response, UNMEER supported a critical change away from a static operational strategy towards a more flexible, nimble approach, recognizing that large Ebola treatment units were not well matched to shifts in the transmission of the virus. This marked a critical change in the posture of the Mission, recognising that enhanced coordination was required to better leverage the capacities of United Nations and non-United Nations partners to decentralize response efforts.

58. The usefulness of the Mission's regional dimension was demonstrated by the establishment of its presence in Mali, whereby UNMEER, with the support of the Logistics Cluster, was able to immediately redeploy equipment and capacities from Liberia to support nationally-led response efforts in Mali. The added value of the United Nations system's cross-border surveillance work in cooperation with national and regional actors was evidenced in the swift containment of the Ebola outbreak in Mali. In the surge mentioned above, UNMEER was able to leverage its regional presence and aviation capacity to redeploy assets and capacities from Liberia to Sierra Leone. The regionalization of UNMEER had greater impact once the response shifted to less of a national and more of a community-based approach that considered the cultural, linguistic and familial interlinkages between communities that transcended borders, as well as heightened mobility in the region. The Mission's regional role helped to ensure coherence between country-level response efforts, including through facilitating technical-level consultations between the affected countries.

59. National response partners highlighted UNMEER contributions in bolstering national operational response capacity. Member States, in the context of the high-level round table, stated that UNMEER helped to operationalize the national Ebola operations centres. It was noted that UNMEER introduced emergency procedures such as standing daily operational meetings to facilitate real-time information-sharing and decision-making. Other contributions that augmented national crisis response capacity included timely funding to support the staffing of national situation rooms, the deployment of rapid response teams and the facilitation of critical office space to promote effective co-location of response efforts in Sierra Leone.

C. Logistics and air operations

60. The lessons learned exercise found that logistics support from UNMEER, WFP and UNMIL was a critical multiplier in the response to facilitate field operations. Assessed funding made possible the rapid provision of logistics assets and enablers, such as vehicles and helicopters, to implementing partners in order to more immediately scale up and decentralize the response, while WFP mobilized funding to launch its special operation to provide fuel, warehouses and transport. A large number of vehicles were donated to operational partners to facilitate critical response activities, including enabling epidemiologists to reach the district level.

61. During the rapid start-up of the Mission, the best way to provide the assessed necessary air service was analysed. Due to the ability to immediately activate standby contracts under existing Secretariat arrangements and to temporarily redeploy aircraft from regional peacekeeping missions, as well as the fact that the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service would require additional extrabudgetary funding at the time in order to provide additional services, the establishment of an air operation for the Mission was deemed prudent.

62. UNMEER facilitated a United Nations air service that was open to all emergency responders. The air service expanded existing United Nations Humanitarian Air Service operations in the region. There was full coordination between the Humanitarian Air Service and the air service facilitated by UNMEER through the de-confliction of routes, co-location of organizational heads of aviation and the adoption of a unified booking process through the Humanitarian Air Service. However, the booking system was not accessible to specialized entities of the United Nations, including WHO, which increased the complexity of making flight bookings for those entities. That challenge reinforces the above-mentioned need to unify support systems to ensure interoperability in the coordination of a system-wide response.

D. Fleet management

63. UNMEER undertook a number of fleet management and assistance roles. As requested by donors, the Mission advised on priorities for vehicle needs and facilitated the transfer of vehicles accordingly. UNMEER donated a large number of vehicles to response partners to support the scaling up of their efforts. The Mission also worked closely with donors, governments and contractors to set up vehicle maintenance and repair workshops to ensure maintenance of the vehicle fleet.

E. Transition planning

64. UNMEER was exceptional in having a limited duration of less than a year. This reflected the Secretary-General's vision, in his original proposal, that the Mission be a temporary measure.

65. In line with existing policy guidance[2] and documented best practice, efforts to commence transition planning began early, in order to provide the time for the United Nations system to mobilize resources to scale up accordingly to fill any gaps

[2] Policy on United Nations transitions in the context of mission drawdown or withdrawal (2013).

that the withdrawal of the Mission would create, so as to ensure a phased and coordinated transition process. The initial planning commenced in February 2015 at a strategic Mission retreat in Accra where the Chef de Cabinet led the process of elaborating the timetable, benchmarks and principles that would underpin a phased transition.

66. The Secretary-General began to signal the eventual transition of UNMEER in his letter to the President of the General Assembly dated 10 February 2015, noting that the transition would involve a gradual and coordinated handover of functions, capacities and assets to United Nations country teams (see A/69/759). It was underscored that the transition would be tailored to both the epidemiology in each country and assessments of existing United Nations capacity to take over UNMEER functions. In his subsequent reporting to the General Assembly, over the following five months, until the Mission's closure in July 2015, the Secretary-General provided monthly updates on progress made in the transition.

67. Through the high-level executive management mechanism convened regularly by the Secretary-General and his senior management team, consensus was reached among United Nations entities on the post-Mission leadership succession arrangements. The process resulted in a unanimous decision by United Nations principals to retain the Ebola Crisis Managers under the rubric of the WHO-led Inter-agency Collaboration on Ebola, in order to ensure continued dedicated leadership and momentum to get to zero Ebola cases, while the resident coordinators would concurrently lead recovery efforts. The process ensured high-level buy-in among all United Nations principals on the concept and modality for the way forward, through a series of meetings in June and July 2015, during which they advocated this outcome. A regional transition workshop of United Nations entities, held in May 2015 in Dakar, also informed this decision. The strategy to withdraw UNMEER and retain the Ebola Crisis Managers for a finite period was discussed by the Secretary-General with the heads of State of the affected countries.

68. The announcement of a phased exit strategy was met with initial resistance on the ground amid fears that the Mission's withdrawal would falsely signify that the outbreak was over and have an adverse impact on resource mobilization efforts. The risk of signalling a premature end to the Ebola outbreak was systematically analysed and informed by the Director General of WHO, the Special Envoy on Ebola, the leadership of the affected countries and the heads of United Nations entities. Communication strategies to mitigate that risk were developed by the Special Envoy on Ebola, in close consultation with the affected countries, and were tailored to the specific messaging requirements of different audiences.

69. Despite those strategies and their implementation, the resistance faced upon the initial announcement, in February 2015, six months prior to the Mission's closure in July, of the planned transition demonstrated that forward exit planning of this nature is not culturally inherent in the United Nations system. It also points to the need to socialize the idea that transition planning does not need to be viewed as detracting from momentum in the response, but rather is another phase of the response itself.

70. Some noted that more timely and frequent communications with implementing and national partners to manage expectations related to the Mission's closure before the countries had reached zero Ebola cases might have helped to mitigate the apprehension of a negative impact on momentum in the response. **The importance**

of incorporating and communicating a systemic exit strategy from the onset in an operation must be further inculcated in the United Nations system to ensure that Mission exit strategies are planned responsibly and do not leave gaps in their transition and handover to United Nations country teams.

F. Liquidation and asset transfer

71. The liquidation of UNMEER was completed on 31 August 2015. At the time of liquidation, UNMEER held non-expendable assets with a purchase value of $19.2 million and a depreciated value of $9.6 million. These were primarily information and communications technology assets, with a smaller number of transport, supply, medical and engineering assets. With the appropriate cost reimbursement, all of those assets were released for use by other missions, based upon priority.

72. In August 2015, the post facto transfer of 297 capitalized and non-capitalized assets, and of 21,991 expendable items of which UNMEER had previously disposed, was approved, in accordance with its special delegation of authority, to United Nations entities and non-governmental and governmental organizations. Notification and approval of such transfers and disposals on a rolling basis would have been preferable, but this was not possible owing to urgent operational requirements and the time frame of the Mission.

73. The process of liquidating UNMEER was particularly complex as a result of the Mission's location across five different countries, the pace of its deployment and the time-bound nature of its closure. Due to the requirement for a rapid deployment and operationalization of the Mission, there were deficiencies in the application of some property management processes and the underdeployment of sufficient property management expertise in the initial start-up period. Such factors complicated the liquidation process. For more effective and efficient liquidation, there needs to be greater synergy between those responsible for personnel, finance and asset drawdown within a Mission and at United Nations Headquarters. These factors notwithstanding, the liquidation process was completed on time.

74. A full report on the liquidation of the Mission was submitted in October 2015 (see A/70/557). An overview of the asset disposal breakdown, taken from the liquidation report, is shown in the annex to the present report.

G. Performance of the Mission and cost recovery

75. The performance report for the Mission is contained in the second performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 (see A/70/557).

76. The inter-agency billing and administrative procedures for the reimbursement of non-Secretariat staff who deployed as part of UNMEER under reimbursable loan agreements were actioned and completed.

77. Owing to the unique nature of UNMEER and some of the specialized new and nearly new equipment that it operated, certain surplus equipment was made available for other missions on a full cost recovery basis (as opposed to shipping costs only). The measure was applied primarily against armoured vehicles and

information and communication technology assets transferred to other missions before 30 June 2015, for a total value of $2.3 million. The assets transferred to other missions in connection with the liquidation of UNMEER were transferred at no cost other than that of their shipping.

78. Due to the unique nature of the Ebola response, a significant number of assets were donated to host governments and response partners both during the Mission's lifespan and upon liquidation. The United Nations donated 359 used United Nations vehicles and a substantial number of items classified as expendables or consumables. UNMEER also separately oversaw the donation of 810 in-kind donor contributions (non-United Nations assets). Such donations were undertaken in full compliance with the financial rules and regulations of the United Nations and related special measures for UNMEER.

VII. Conclusions

79. While views were expressed to the effect that the implementation of its mandate or the structure of the Mission could have been improved upon, the concept of UNMEER and the strategic benefits that it brought to the response in terms of leadership, facilitation, logistics and immediate funding were validated.

80. The pivotal question remains whether the creation of an entity similar to UNMEER should be considered in the future, in response to unprecedented crises. The lessons learned exercise determined that there was support for an improved and streamlined model, one that combines the critical components of an immediate influx of resources, empowered leadership and logistics support with a light structural footprint that builds upon existing humanitarian coordination mechanisms and in-country capacities. Both high-level round tables concluded that the concept was appropriate insofar as a command structure was needed to offer facilitating leadership, speed of decision-making and operational direction to enable a massive scale-up. However, it was also noted that the execution of the concept could have been implemented by leveraging existing capacities and coordination mechanisms to a much greater extent, which would have resulted in a lighter structure.

81. Round-table and interview findings supported the view that UNMEER worked well at a strategic level as a facilitator, but had considerably less added value when it was involved in operations or the technical response in actual implementation. In order to play such a facilitating role effectively, it was essential that UNMEER had a synergistic relationship with the rest of the United Nations system and implementing partners. The research also underscored that the system should exercise greater flexibility in adjusting and adapting existing operational coordination and response systems to address the specificities of crises as they unfold. The system must be ready to adapt its machinery in new ways to respond to different contexts, but must also ensure that it does not overlook existing capacities, mechanisms and structures, which can sometimes react more quickly if activated in a timely fashion.

82. The flexibility shown by Member States in the budget process for UNMEER positively enabled a rapid crisis response. The allocation of funding based on an initial concept and then the tailoring of that concept in line with updated assessments of needs and capacities on the ground was instrumental in this regard.

83. Reflecting on the deployment of UNMEER raises key questions for the United Nations system, as it is called upon to be ready to deploy in regional and transborder contexts, as regards how to balance ensuring proximity and sensitivity to local specificities with providing strategic oversight from a regional level. Questions include whether an entity should be asked to do both those tasks and, if so, what the implications would be for how an operation is conceptualized, designed and structured.

84. Moving out of crisis provides an opportunity to take stock of what has been collectively learned. It is in the aftermath that lessons learned must be applied to improve United Nations crisis management capacities to respond to the next unprecedented crisis. The lessons learned exercise concerning UNMEER yields a number of important considerations for how the United Nations system could more effectively work together in responding to crisis.

85. Undertaking a reflective, critical and constructive review of United Nations system-wide intervention does not detract from the major contributions and shared commitment of United Nations entities and personnel who heeded the call to action, but supports the system in collectively gaining the understanding required to promote institutional change. In keeping with the Secretary-General's vision that the lessons learned exercise invite candid feedback in order to identify meaningful lessons, the key findings reflect a critical analysis that should not be taken to detract from the individual and collective efforts of all involved in the response.

86. The Secretary-General should like to extend his utmost gratitude and appreciation to the members of the General Assembly for their enduring political, financial and operational support in responding to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The Assembly showed what is possible when the Organization is united and takes decisive, bold action in the face of unprecedented challenges.

87. **The General Assembly is requested to take note of the present report.**

Annex

Asset disposal breakdown

(United States dollars)

Asset disposal group	*Quantity*	*Percentage*	*Inventory value*	*Depreciated value*
Group 1: transfers to other missions	2 308	70.62	9 237 445.12	5 908 862.22
Group 2: transfers to Secretariat entities	32	1.25	175 585.83	6 500.80
Group 3: donations to agencies, funds and programmes	37	1.19	1 738 637.73	701 133.51
Group 4: donations to Governments and non-governmental organizations	871	26.94	10 092 296.97	2 190 952.92

Note: See A/70/557.

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Agenda item 134
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Letter dated 3 February 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Swaziland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to write, in my capacity as the chairman of the African Group for the month of February 2016, first, to present the African Group's best wishes to you at the dawn of a new year and for the successful conclusion of your mandate and, second, to address the issue of the upcoming unveiling of the commemorative "Free and equal" postage stamps promoting LGBT equality worldwide, co-organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Postal Administration. The unveiling is scheduled to be held on Thursday, 4 February 2016, at 3 p.m. in the lobby of the General Assembly Building.

The African Group notes with interest and indeed serious reservations that the "Free and equal" postage stamps to be unveiled are aiming at promoting LGBT equality worldwide. In particular, the African Group is concerned that the notions of sexual orientation and gender identity related to LGBT continue to be controversial among United Nations Member States, and the African Group has consistently maintained its stance in accordance with the decision adopted by African leaders at the fifteenth ordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union, held in Kampala, which, among other things, strongly rejected any attempt to undermine the international human rights system by seeking to impose concepts or notions pertaining to social matters, including private individual conduct that falls outside the internationally agreed human rights legal framework.

The African Group therefore views notions of sexual orientation and gender identity related to LGBT as a negation of article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that they undermine the right of Member States to enact laws that meet "just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society". Moreover, the Group is of the view that giving priority to the rights of certain individuals could result in negative discrimination at the expense of other internationally agreed rights and thereby run counter to the principles of non-discrimination and equality.

As a matter of procedure, the African Group is even more concerned that an intergovernmental consultative process had not guided the decision-making process

regarding this highly controversial issue, as is the usual practice regarding United Nations events organized by United Nations entities at United Nations Headquarters, and, ultimately, it raises a number of legal and financial issues. The Group is of the view that obtaining approval from Member States for organizing such an event is imperative in order to avoid any chance of undermining the respected emblem of the United Nations logo by associating it with issues that do not enjoy universal consensus.

It is in view of the foregoing that the African Group would like to appeal to you to kindly consider the cancellation of the unveiling event, scheduled to be held on 4 February 2016, regarding the postage stamps promoting LGBT equality worldwide with a view to submitting the issue for consideration through the usual intergovernmental process.

The African Group should be most grateful if the present letter would be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Zwelethu **Mnisi**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

United Nations A/70/739

General Assembly

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Seventieth session
Agenda item 134
Programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017

Letter dated 16 February 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Swaziland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

With reference to the letter dated 3 February 2016 regarding the issuance of "Free and equal" postage stamps, at an event held at United Nations Headquarters earlier this month (A/70/738), please note that, unfortunately, I have not received any feedback from you with regard to that important topic.

The African Group seeks clarification regarding the following points:

1. Has the above-mentioned event been endorsed by Member States in any intergovernmental body? The Secretariat of the United Nations should not associate the United Nations logo with a stamp promoting a controversial issue without consulting with Member States. It is worth mentioning that the use of the logo is governed by certain legal rules, including copyrights.

2. How was this event financed, and under which budget item?

3. What are the future steps by the United Nations Secretariat related to the issuance of this stamp (sale, distribution, printing, etc.)? And how will revenue from these stamps be used?

Given all the previous considerations, the African Group requests an urgent meeting with you to discuss that issue before the beginning of the resumed session of the Fifth Committee.

The African Group further requests that its letters be circulated as documents of the General Assembly, under agenda item 134.

(*Signed*) Zwelethu **Mnisi**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative